

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM "E-NEWS"  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources  
Jeff Vonk, Director  
Richard Bishop, Wildlife Bureau Chief  
Vol. 3, No. 1, March, 2004

INDEX:

- 2004 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey Report
- Ringgold County Prairie Chicken Day
- West Nile Virus and Black-capped Chickadees
- Fish & Wildlife Fund Need Your Support
- Sandhill Crane Survey
- Iowa to Host Watchable Wildlife Conference
- Bluebird Conference at Ames

2004 MIDWINTER BALD EAGLE SURVEY REPORT  
by Mark McInroy, Natural Resource Technician

Iowans did an excellent job of completing 51 of 54 standardized routes this year. Iowa's survey count this year yielded record 4432 bald eagles found in 55 Iowa counties. This count includes the Standard Survey Routes and additional (48) observations seen while conducting an annual statewide aerial waterfowl survey. The previous high count was 2001 with 2493 bald eagles. Although this year's count is exceptionally high, it continues the upward trend over the last decade. Once all the midwestern regional data has been compiled we can determine the noteworthiness of Iowa's count.

On average, this survey was conducted January 9th. The average temperature was 23.6 F, and the ice conditions were estimated over all surveys at about 75% ice cover. Although mild conditions preceded the survey date, comments indicate general conditions during the survey were normal to slightly colder than normal. Most areas had comment that largest concentrations occurred near open water. Generally, the more open water on all rivers the more widespread the distribution of bald eagles. The year 2002 and 2003 had 20-65% and 34% average ice cover respectively. Both of these years had only 30% and 47% of all bald eagles counted along the Mississippi River; while in 2001 and 2004 there was 81% and 75% average ice cover with over 70% of the total count represented along "big muddy" each of these years.

Since 2001 the percentage of immature bald eagles has ranged from 30%-42%. This year 40.5% of all bald eagles counted were immature. This is still a substantial juvenile population and seems to indicate the overall population is stable or growing.

The overall upward trend in winter eagle survey numbers could be reflective of the number of eagle nests. Recent data shows continued increase with 61 Iowa counties and about 160 total nests documented. The future for eagles continues to look promising!

\*\*\*\*\*

RINGGOLD COUNTY PRAIRIE CHICKEN DAY  
by Pat Schlarbaum, Natural Resource Technician

Plan to join birders and prairie enthusiasts at Kellerton Bird Conservation Area, April 17, for Ringgold County Prairie Chicken Day. Prairie chickens will be strutting and booming at dawn and are easily observed at viewing site two miles west of Kellerton to 300th St. then 1 ½ mile south. Wildlife managers, Mel Moe, Ed White, and AmeriCorps specialist Ben Mullarkey will coordinate planting 10,000 prairie forbs at the viewing site, after breakfast.

Public is encouraged to help grow this area. The Kellerton United Methodist Church will be putting on the pancake breakfast. It will be held in the town of Kellerton and begin at 7:00AM. Pancakes, sausage and juice will be \$5 per person and is all you can eat. Following is a list of lodging opportunities.

Mel is hoping for a pleasant turnout of prairie and birding enthusiasts to enjoy all the natural resources of this quiet and beautiful southern Iowa region. As a bonus, we're hoping to infuse a much needed economic boost to Kellerton community. So plan to share the weekend with birds and prairie and remember - that tank of gas, lodging, or sit down meal can go far ensuring the growth of Kellerton Bird Conservation Area.

#### HOTELS

With Approximate Distance to Kellerton BCA

Clinton Motel 641-464-3201	10 miles
Hwy 2 , Mt. Ayr IA	

The Lodge 641-464-3264	10 miles
102 E. Madison, Mt. Ayr IA	

Chief Lamoni Hotel 641-784-3329	15 miles
I-35 and Hwy 69, Lamoni IA	

Super 8 Motel 641-784-7500	15 miles
I-35 and Hwy 69, Lamoni IA	

Arbor Inn 641-446-4595	17 miles
107 NW 4th Street, Leon IA	

Leon Motel 641-446-4832	17 miles
1605 W. 1st Street, Leon IA	

Little River Inn Motel 641-446-4883	17 miles
708 W. 1st Street, Leon IA	

Americinn Motel and Suites 641-342-9400	5 miles
111 Ariel Circle, Osceola IA	

Best Western Regal Inn Motel 641-342-2123	35 miles
1520 Jeffries Dr., Osceola IA	

Blue Haven Motel 641-342-2115	35 miles
325 s Main St., Osceola IA	

Days Inn 641-342-6666	35 miles
710 Warren Ave., Osceola IA	

Motor Inn Motel 641-342-3162 35 miles  
221 W. McLane, Osceola IA

Super 8 Motel 641-342-6594 35 miles  
720 Warren Ave, Osceola IA

#### BED AND BREAKFASTS

With Approximate Distance to Kellerton BCA

Lesanville Inn Bed and Breakfast 641-464-3178 5 miles  
Hwy 2 Mt. Ayr IA

Charlie-Jane's 641-464- 10 miles  
2564

400 W. Madison Street, Mt. Ayr IA

Country Ayr Cottages 641-464-3519 10 miles  
Mt. Ayr IA

Arbor Inn 641-446-4595 17 miles  
107 NW 4th Street, Leon IA

Double Stitch B&B 641-446-8088 17 miles  
23734 U.S Hwy 69, Leon IA

#### CAMPGROUNDS

Poe Hollow Park 641-464-2787 5 miles  
(Ringgold County Conservation Board)  
Hwy 2 Mt. Ayr IA

Shade Tree Rv 641-783-2595 8 miles  
County Rd. P64 Kellerton IA

Nine Eagles State Park 641-442-2855 25 miles  
RR 1 Davis City IA

\*\*\*\*\*

#### WEST NILE VIRUS AND BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES

By Bruce Ehresman, Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist

Several people from different areas of Iowa expressed concern that they were seeing many fewer black-capped chickadees this winter. Since it seemed that we, too, at the Boone Wildlife Research Station were seeing many fewer chickadees at our feeders this winter, I decided to look into the matter. The main report that chickadee numbers are down comes from Project FeederWatch at Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. The 16,000 volunteer citizen-scientists who participate in the survey reported fewer chickadees and crows, particularly in West Nile Virus (WNV) infected areas. David Bonter, who directs Project FeederWatch noted that the winter counts of 2002-03 for

black-capped and Carolina chickadees, as well as for American crows fell to a 15-year low in the Midwest. Black-capped chickadee numbers, in particular, were 32% lower than their historic FeederWatch average. Another study implicating West Nile Virus in the decrease of chickadees was done in Chicago.

Twenty-two chickadee searches (by Audubon and the Bird Conservation Network), totaling 81 hours, turned up only two chickadees in an area of approximately 120 square miles. The area where chickadees were missing in the north suburbs corresponded to the highest incidence of human WNV cases.

While West Nile Virus is being implicated in chickadee population declines in some areas, some ornithologists feel there might be other environmental factors influencing this species, as well. A look at the chickadee population throughout its range indicates that declines in numbers began as early as 1998, a year before West Nile Virus was introduced to this country. It is normal for bird populations to fluctuate over time, so most bird experts are hopeful that the chickadee numbers will rebound again in the near future. Even if WNV is playing a role in this shift in numbers, natural resistance to the disease is almost certainly already happening, and fewer chickadees should succumb to the disease each season.

To take a closer look at what might be happening in Iowa, I looked at the data for black-capped chickadees counted on Iowa's Christmas Bird Counts during the last four winters (not including this winter). Statewide, there were 6,751 chickadees counted in 1999-2000, 6,413 tabulated in 2000-2001, 7,074 counted in 2001-2002, and 7,143 documented in 2002-2003. Based on this survey information, there is no evidence of chickadee decline in Iowa's wintering population. The summer and fall of 2002 was when WNV had its largest impact on Iowa birds, and yet the Christmas Bird Count data shows an increase in number of chickadees counted. That's good news! Even though this survey may not reflect accurately the status of Iowa's breeding chickadees, it probably does reflect what is happening to the population on a larger scale. While some of us feel we are seeing fewer chickadees this year in some areas, I am confident that the ever-resilient chickadee will stage a comeback and will once again be flocking to our feeders.

\*\*\*\*\*

FISH/WILDLIFE FUND- Nongame Wildlife Needs Your Support  
by Mark McInroy

Research and habitat management for game species such as deer, turkeys, waterfowl and pheasants are funded through license fees, habitat stamps and income taxes. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Diversity Program represents the 80% of Iowa's wildlife that is not hunted. This program has no stable source of funding and relies mainly on contributions from the public.

To make a contribution to the Wildlife Diversity Program and invest in the future of Iowa's nongame wildlife, remember to give to the Fish/Wildlife Fund (Chickadee Checkoff) on your state income tax form. Your contribution will be used to conduct research and provide habitat management for Iowa's nongame species and promote education and enjoyment of those species to the public.

In recent years, contributions to the Nongame Program were used to conduct

research and surveys on Iowa's frogs and toads, wintering bald eagles, heron rookeries, bats, and Iowa's raptors. Public events such as Bald Eagle Appreciation Days, Pelican Fest, and Hawk Watch, which attracted nearly 20,000 people, were also funded through donations. Several publications on the appreciation of Iowa's diverse wildlife and management of it were distributed to thousands of people. With respect to Iowa's wildlife diversity, currently many are the beneficiary of contributions by few.

Research of the Fish/Wildlife Fund (Chickadee Checkoff) shows an average \$10 contribution from a mere 1% (approx.) of the population filing income tax. This manner of funding does not match the level of management needed across Iowa. With 45% of Iowa's population over age 16 engaging in wildlife watching activities, there is much funding potential to realize.

Please remember to tell your tax preparer that you would like to contribute to the Fish/Wildlife Fund (Chickadee Checkoff). By donating a few dollars, you will be helping in the conservation of 400+ nongame animals. Please invest in Iowa's natural beauty by supporting its wildlife diversity. For more information please contact the Wildlife Diversity Program at 1436 255th St. Boone, Iowa 50036 or by calling 515-432-2823

\*\*\*\*\*

#### SANDHILL CRANE SURVEY by Pat Schlarbaum

The annual Sandhill Crane survey will be conducted April 17. This survey is coordinated nationally by International Crane Foundation from Baraboo, Wisconsin. If you would like to participate and be included in this exciting recovery of a native species to Iowa, please contact Pat at (515) 432-2823.

In 1992, after a 98-year absence, Sandhill Cranes successfully nested in Iowa at Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area in Tama County. Two colts were produced. In 1993, cranes also attempted to nest at a second area at Green Island along the Mississippi River in Jackson County, however due to annual flooding, young were not produced at that site until 1997. In the mean time cranes at Sweet Marsh became established and successfully nested, beginning in 1994. The Sweet Marsh flock has grown to include four other sites in Bremer Co. Other sites around the state are including Greater Sandhill Cranes as these birds pioneer into their previous range.

In 2003 unison calling between adults increased to 27 pairs. There were 95 known sightings and fifteen documented young in Iowa. As this recovery proceeds these numbers will undoubtedly increase due to all the wetland work throughout the state. County Conservation Boards, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, private citizens, and DNR are united in this quest to provide suitable habitat for wetland wildlife.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### IOWA TO HOST WATCHABLE WILDLIFE CONFERENCE by Doug Harr, Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator

The Dubuque Convention & Visitor's Bureau, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources,

and Iowa Tourism are teaming up with Watchabale Wildlife, Inc., to host this year's national Watchable Wildlife Conference. The event will be held Oct. 5-8 at Dubuque's sparkling new "America's River" showplace, right on the Mississippi River waterfront.

Dubuque was selected as this year's conference site, taking advantage of the river's spectacular natural resources and opportunities for growth in the rapidly expanding area of "wildlife tourism". Attendees will select from a choice of conference "tracks", focused upon natural resource conservation, viewing site development and management, and wildlife tourism. Noted national speakers will conduct many aspects of the conference, which will be based around a community named "Grackle Junction, Iowa" that is seeking to develop its potential for wildlife tourism. Several field trips will highlight the Mississippi and adjacent resources. The conference will appeal to wildlife or natural resource professionals, chambers of commerce or local tourism offices, private businesses catering to tourists, and many others.

More information will be announced as conference plans are finalized over the next three months. For starters, you'll find preliminary conference information at the following website:

[www.watchablewildlife.org](http://www.watchablewildlife.org)

\*\*\*\*\*

#### BLUEBIRD CONFERENCE AT AMES

by Pat Schlarbaum

Story County Conservation and Iowa Bluebird Conservationists (IBC) are hosting a Bluebird Conference, April 24, 9:30AM - 4 PM. Pre-registration for lunch is requested by April 21. Bring your own lunch if you like. Bluebird enthusiasts from Nebraska and Minnesota will be presenting. Dave Ahlgren's talk is entitled, "Everything you want to know about Bluebirds and then another 10,000 words." Jaclyn Hill will be offering her J.Hill Bluebird Box for \$3.00. This event is always well attended with plenty of opportunity to share successes or concerns with bluebirders from around the state. You can contact Carol at (515) 232-2516 or [cwilliams@storycounty.com](mailto:cwilliams@storycounty.com). The Story County Conservation Center is located at 56461 180th Street, about 4 miles north east of Ames.

- From Ames, take 13th Street to Dayton Avenue. Turn north onto Dayton, traveling four miles to 180th Street. At 180th Street, turn east and travel ½ mile. The center is on the north side of the road.

- From Highway 69, take Riverside Road east to Dayton Avenue, then north two miles to 180th Street, and then east ½ mile to the center.

- From Interstate 35, take Exit 116 (County Road E-29). Travel west ½ mile to Dayton Avenue, then north one mile to 180th Street, and then east ½ mile to the center.

\*\*\*\*\*

Federal regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or disability. If you believe you have been

discriminated against in any program, activity or facility described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Director, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. Ninth Ave., Des Moines, IA 50319-0034, or the Equal Opportunity Commission, Washington, DC 20240.

.